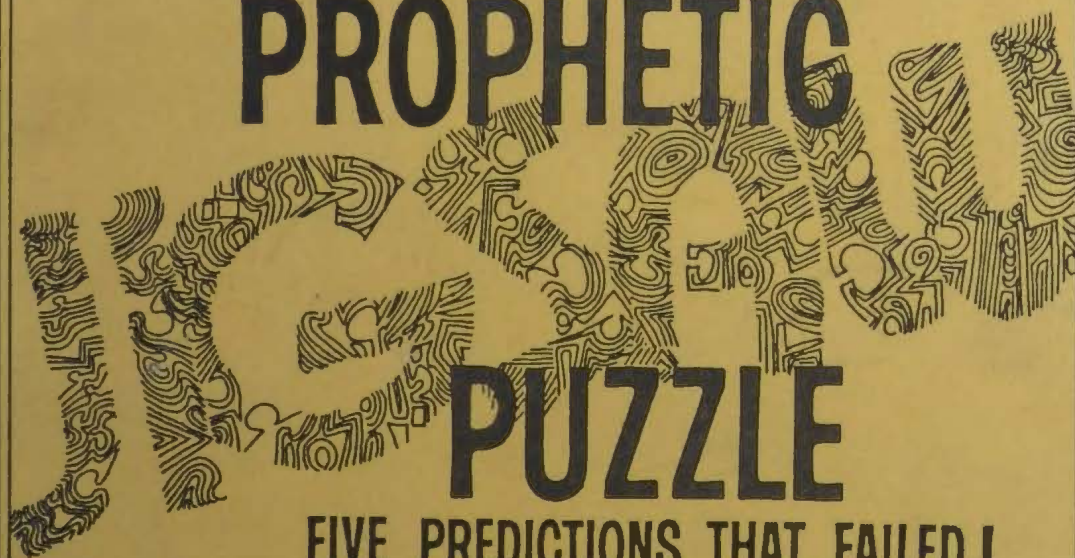


HAL LINDSEY'S PROPHETIC



PUZZLE

FIVE PREDICTIONS THAT FAILED !

SAMUELE
BACCHIOCCHI

Hal Lindsey's books on End-time prophecies are selling by the millions at the breathless rate usually associated with hamburgers. His jigsaw puzzle approach turns Biblical prophecies into a crystal ball through which he predicts with astonishing boldness the precise pattern of events which are to occur by the end of the 1980s--the time when the present history of this world is supposed to end.

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi analyzes Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle, exposing the fallacy of five specific predictions which have failed to come to pass. His purpose, however, is not just to show that Lindsey's predictions are **fiction** rather than **fact**. With sound scholarship he helps the reader understand the true nature and purpose of End-time prophecies.

The book is written in a clear and simple style which the common person can understand. Rather than engaging the reader in a technical analysis of Lindsey's arbitrary method of prophetic interpretation, Bacchiocchi has chosen to show with compelling clarity and logic, how time has already proved Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle to be a **fiction** rather than a **fact**.

Dr. Samuel Bacchiocchi is the first non-Catholic to graduate from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He received a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of **summa cum laude**. He earned degrees also in the USA and served as missionary in Ethiopia.

He has authored the two bestsellers **From Sabbath to Sunday** and **Divine Rest for Human Restlessness** which have been favorably reviewed by many scholars of differing persuasions.



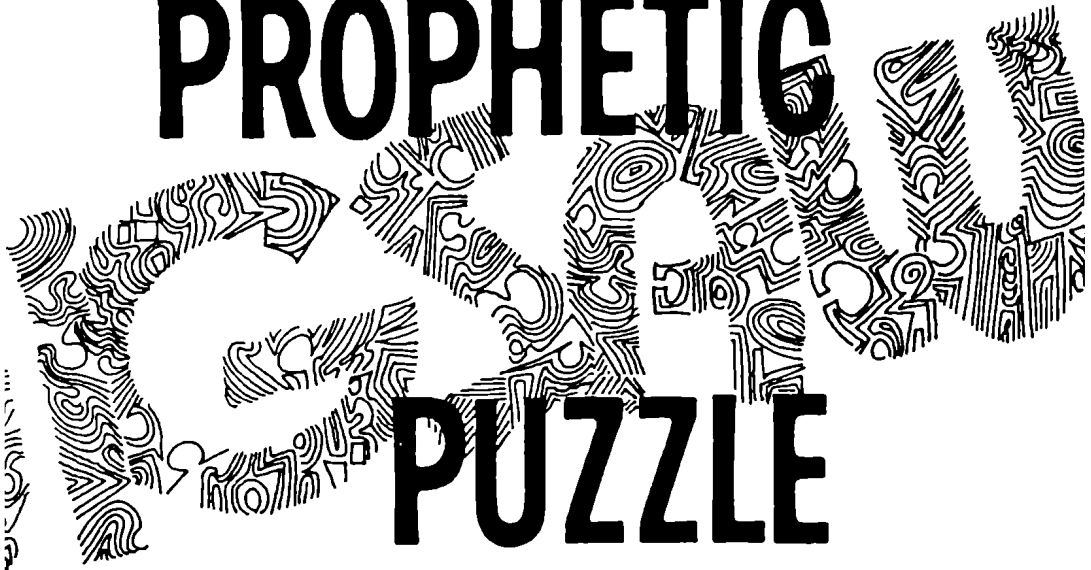
During the last few years he has conducted LORD'S DAY SEMINARS in many parts of the world, helping thousands to find a greater measure of divine peace and rest through a genuine celebration of the Sabbath.

Currently Dr. Bacchiocchi is professor of Church History and Theology which he teaches at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104, USA.

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HAL LINDSEY'S PROPHETIC



FIVE PREDICTIONS THAT FAILED !

SAMUELE
BACCHIOCCHI

**Biblical
Perspectives**

230 Lisa Lane
BERRIEN SPRINGS
MICHIGAN 49103

DEDICATED

***to my dear wife, Anna,
whose love and encouragement
motivates me to greater service***

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PREFACE

Very seldom non-fiction books reach the bestselling list, and if they do it, they do not remain on such a list for very long. A notable exception are Hal Lindsey's books on End-time prophecies. His first book **The Late Great Planet Earth** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), is touted by the publisher as "the bestselling non-fiction book of the decade, selling more than 18 million copies worldwide."

Other books written by Lindsey have enjoyed similar popularity. For example, **The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon** (New York, Bantan Books: 1980) has been, as stated on the cover, for "over 20 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list."

Lindsey's books are popular not merely because they are written in a clear, crispy, journalistic style, but primarily because they predict with astonishing boldness the precise pattern of events which are to occur before the end of the 1980s, the time when the battle of Armageddon will take place, bringing to an end the present history of this world.

The End-time scenario portrayed by Lindsey is duplicated with modifications in a whole spate of similar publications, which range in size from a 46 pages picture book entitled **The Beast** (Chino, California: Chick Publications, 1966) to a 490 pages detailed prognostications by William Dankenbring, **The Last Days of the Planet Earth: A Survival Guide to the End of the World** (Altadena, California: Triumph publishing Co., 1981).

The reason for the popularity of this "Christian apocalyptic" literature is not hard to find. The uncertainty prevalent in the world today, fueled by a host of social, political, economic, ecological factors which threaten human survival, drives people to look for something to hang on. While some turn to horoscopes or to Jeanne Dixon for light on the future, others turn to "Christian prophets" such as Hal Lindsey who uses the Bible as a crystal ball to forecast the immediate future.

The scholarly community in general chooses to ignore this contemporary "apocalyptic" literature, viewing it as unworthy of consideration. Such a position, however, hardly helps the million of Christians who have built their hopes for the future on such sensational but senseless literature. Thus, out of a sense of moral obligation toward sincere but misled Christians, I have decided to write this booklet. I have chosen to analyze Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle simply because he is the best popularizer of the widespread school of prophetic interpretation, known as dispensationalist.

My aim is twofold. First, to show the fallacy of Lindsey's prophetic scenario by exposing five of his specific predictions which have failed to come to pass. Second, to help believers understand the true nature and function of End-time prophecies.

This booklet has grown out of an article which I wrote for **Ministry**, at the request of its editor, J. Robert Spangler. To the latter I wish to express my appreciation for the invitation and inspiration to write on Hal Lindsey. A special thanks also to Dr. Leona Running and to Mrs. Sue Schwab for proofreading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

The content of this booklet represents a brief summary of two chapters of my larger study entitled **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**, scheduled to be released by December 1985. The reader is recommended to read this larger study for a fuller understanding of the certainty, imminence and relevance of the Second Advent.

CHAPTER ONE

SPYING THE FUTURE

To know the exact time when important events are expected to occur is a burning human desire. To satisfy such a desire we listen daily to a host of forecasters who predict, with more or less accuracy, when to expect a snowstorm or tornado, an eclipse, a lunar landing, an economic upturn or downturn, the end of a war, etc. Knowing in advance when a major event will occur gives a sense of preparedness and control over the future.

The Date of the Second Advent. One of the greatest desires cherished by many Christians throughout the centuries has been that of knowing the exact time and circumstances of their Lord's Return. To satisfy such a desire, well-meaning Christians from Montanus in the second century to Hal Lindsey in the twentieth century have attempted to determine from the Scriptures the exact time-table of events leading to the Second Advent.

Martin Luther himself, though he strongly condemned Michael Stifel for fixing the date of the end of the world at 8 a.m. of October 19, 1553, worked frantically in 1530 to finish his translation of the Bible because he believed Christ would return before he could complete it. "For it is certain from the Holy Scriptures," he wrote, "that we have no more temporal things to expect. All is done and

fulfilled: the Roman Empire is at an end; the Turk has reached his highest point; the pomp of papacy is falling away and the world is cracking on all sides almost as if it would break and fall apart entirely."¹

It is not surprising that new attempts to derive from Biblical prophecies the exact time and circumstances of Christ's Return are intensifying today. The approach of the ominous year 2000, coupled with the ever-increasing threat to human survival posed by such factors as international tensions, social disorders, natural and man-made disasters, nuclear armaments, population explosion, pollution, and depletion of natural resources, leads many people to seek for light on the future.

While some people today hope to find such a light by turning to horoscopes, to Jeanne Dixon, or to authors like George Orwell, others turn to "Christian prophets" such as Hal Lindsey, who uses Biblical prophecies as a crystal ball to predict the time and the events leading to Armageddon and Christ's Return.

Scholarly studies generally ignore the capricious interpretation of Biblical prophecies of authors such as Hal Lindsey. To do so, however, means to fail to help the millions of people who have been misled by this kind of literature. Thus, I have decided to write this booklet, not for the pleasure of hunting heresy, but rather out of a sense of duty to help many Christians understand "that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20).

Attention will be given primarily to Hal Lindsey's imaginative prophetic jigsaw puzzle (as he likes to call it)² of end-time events, because he is the top popularizer of the widely accepted school of prophetic interpretation known as dispensationalism.

Objectives. My immediate objective is to help readers see for themselves how time has already proved Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle to be fiction rather than fact. Rather than engaging the reader in a lengthy analysis of Lindsey's arbitrary method of prophetic interpretation, consideration will be given primarily to five specific predictions which have failed to take place.³

The task of proving the fallacy of Lindsey's predictions is facilitated by the fact that, contrary to most dispensational writers, Lindsey has assigned precise dates to his timetable of End-time events. It may come as a surprise and disappointment to many to discover that five key pieces of Lindsey's jigsaw puzzle have failed to fall into place.

My ultimate objective is to help readers understand some of the vital functions of the prophetic Advent signs. To this question I have devoted the last two chapters of this booklet. It is my fervent hope that this brief study may encourage many people to look forward, not to the occurrence of **impersonal events**, but rather to the coming of our **personal Savior** Jesus Christ, who is our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

If this booklet arouses your interest for a clearer and fuller understanding of End-time

prophecies, then I would urge you to read my fuller treatment of this vital subject, entitled **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**. The latter represents years of dedicated research on numerous aspects of the Advent Hope which are particularly relevant to our life and time.

1. Quoted in Stephen Travis, **I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus** (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 118; also in T. F. Torrance, **Kingdom and Church** (Edinburgh and London, 1956), p. 20. For a brief survey of date-setters, see Robert A. Clouse, "The Danger of Mistaken Hopes," in **Handbook of Biblical Prophecy**, eds. Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 27-39.

2. See, for example, Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, **The Late Great Planet Earth** (Grand Rapids, 1970), pp. 42, 58, 80, 87. Henceforth referred to as **Planet**.

3. This booklet represents a brief summary of chapters 7 and 15 of my new book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**. The reader is referred to this study for a more exhaustive analysis of this subject.

**CHAPTER
TWO**

**LINDSEY'S
SCHOOL OF
PROPHETIC
INTERPRETATION**

Originators of totally new ideas are few and far between. This is true for all disciplines, including that of prophetic interpretation. What at first may appear as a startling new interpretation of End-time prophecies, under closer scrutiny is revealed to be a repetition with modifications of an older view. Lindsey's prophetic scenario is no exception, as it is largely derived from the school of prophetic interpretation known as dispensationalism.

I. DISPENSATIONALISM

Origin. The origin of dispensationalism is generally traced back to John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a leader of the Plymouth Brethren who rejected the idea of the **unity** of the covenants, teaching instead that redemptive history is divided in **distinct dispensations** or segments of time, in each of which God has been working with humanity in a different way.¹

Applied to the future, the dispensational system assumes that the Christian Church is not the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but rather an "interruption" or an "intercalation" that began at Pentecost and will terminate when Christ comes invisibly and secretly to take away believers out of this

world to heaven. This event, which is known as the Secret Rapture, is believed to take place seven years before the visible and glorious coming of Christ. The Rapture marks the end of the dispensation of the Church and the beginning of the restoration of the Old Testament dispensation of Israel.

Extent. The stronghold of dispensationalism today is the Dallas Theological Seminary, where Lindsey himself received his theological training. The outlook of the Dallas Seminary is clearly discernible in Lindsey's books where he plugs the literature of his former professors.

An estimated two hundred Bible institutes, including the Chicago Moody Bible Institute, teach dispensationalism in principle.² Its influence extends beyond North America to several other countries, as indicated by 30 foreign editions of Lindsey's books.

The Prophetic Role of Modern Israel. The center of the entire End-time prophetic scenario is, for dispensationalists, the modern State of Israel. Leon J. Wood, a leading dispensationalist, explicitly states: "The clearest sign of Christ's return is the modern state of Israel."³ The official establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, with David Ben-Gurion's Declaration of Independence, is regarded as **the** End-time sign which started the prophetic countdown to Armageddon and to the Second Advent.

II. LINDSEY'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Popularizer. The credit for popularizing the above view on a global scale must be given to Hal Lindsey. His popularly written books are selling by the millions at the breathless rate usually associated with hamburgers. "Seldom," aptly writes John M. Mulder, "has a 'prophet' been accorded such honor, or rather sales, in his own land."⁴

Lindsey's popularity extends well beyond his own land, since **The Late Great Planet Earth** is said to have sold over 30 million copies in 31 foreign editions.⁵ "When Hal Lindsey appeared on television in the Netherlands," writes Dr. Cornelis Vanderwaal, "it became clear that even sober Calvinists welcomed his dispensationalism with open arms. His predictions about the future were accepted and believed."⁶

The return of the Jews to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel, are, to say the least, most remarkable events. So it is not surprising that many Christians and Jews see in these events the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

It is quite possible **personally** to believe in the right of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine and in God's providential leading in the establishment of the State of Israel, but such a belief, as I have shown in my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**, cannot be legitimately grounded on Biblical prophecies.

Date-setter. Lindsey has contributed to making dispensationalism not only more popular, but also more sensational, by giving specific dates to its End-time scenario. The fixed starting point of Lindsey's End-time prophetic scenario is 1948, the year of the establishment of the State of Israel. He views this event as the key piece of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle and calls it "the most important prophetic sign to herald the era of Christ's return."⁷

Lindsey draws this conclusion from the parable of the "fig tree" given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse: "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates" (Matt 24:32-33).

The parable of the fig tree contains, according to Lindsey, "**an extremely important time clue**"⁸ to calculate the approximate date of Christ's visible Return. He finds the time clue in the reference to the putting forth of the first leaves by the fig tree. This imagery, for Lindsey, represents the restoration of national Israel which occurred "on 14 May 1948 . . . when the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again."⁹ According to Lindsey, Christ referred to this specific event to "indicate that He was 'at the door', ready to return."¹⁰ To further delimit the nearness of His Return, Christ then said: "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place" (Matt 24:34).

Lindsey's Date of Christ's Return. "This generation," for Lindsey, refers to "the generation that would see the signs--chief among them the rebirth of Israel."¹¹ In an interview conducted in 1977 by Ward Gasque and published in **Christianity Today**, Lindsey emphatically stated his conviction that "Matthew 24:34 teaches that 'This generation' means the generation which sees Israel (the 'fig tree' of verse 32) back in the land of Palestine--this is the chief sign--and sees all the other signs of Matthew 24 being fulfilled."¹²

Since "a generation in the Bible is something like forty years, then," Lindsey predicted in 1970, "within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place."¹³ By "all these things" Lindsey clearly means all the events leading to and including Christ's Return. To give support to this prediction, he adds: "Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so."¹⁴

What this means is that, according to Lindsey's prophetic scenario, within the 40 years of the last generation which began in 1948, that is, by 1988, all the prophecies pointing to Christ's Return must be fulfilled.¹⁵

The same conviction is expressed by other dispensational writers like David Webber and Noah Hutchings, who explicitly state: "Forty is the Jewish number for testing. Since Israel was refounded as a nation in 1948, she has been tested like no other nation has been tested before. . . . The Bible indicates that Israel will be tested until the Messiah comes. Forty

years from 1948 is 1988."¹⁶ Thus Webber and Hutchings, like Lindsey, venture to predict, obviously with some caution, "that Jesus Christ will return in 1988."¹⁷

This conviction is also the underlying assumption of Lindsey's film, named after his book **The Late Great Planet Earth**. In his review of this film, Gary Wilburn notes that its fundamental assumption is that: "The world must end within one generation from the birth of the state of Israel. Any opinion of world affairs that does not dovetail with this prophecy is dismissed."¹⁸

The same conviction is expressed by the very title of Lindsey's book **The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon** (1981). In its preface, Lindsey writes: "Many people will be shocked by what will happen in the very near future. **The decade of the 1980's could very well be the last decade of history as we know it.**"¹⁹ Since we are already half-way through the 1980's, it is legitimate to verify if, to borrow Lindsey's own favorite imagery, all the key pieces of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle are rapidly falling into place according to his timetable.

In the next two chapters we will endeavor, first, to identify the key pieces of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle (chapter 3) and then to examine five of the important pieces which have failed to fall into place (chapter 4).

This exposé of Lindsey's mistaken predictions is not intended to dampen hope in a soon-Coming Savior. My only contention is that the time of Christ's Return is unpredictable and consequently it could be sooner than

Lindsey predicted. Expectancy and readiness for the Return of our Lord must be based, not on a preconceived timetable of End-time events, but on the certainty of His promise, which is confirmed by the constant signs of divine grace and human rebellion.

1. The most systematic and apologetic presentation of dispensationalism is given by H. S. Chafer, in **Systematic Theology**, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947). John F. Walvoord, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has developed dispensationalism in the following books: **Israel in Prophecy** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1962); **The Millennial Kingdom** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974); **The Rapture Question** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957); **The Return of the Lord** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971).

2. For a most perceptive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation, see Hans K. LaRondelle, **The Israel of God in Prophecy** (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1983).

3. Leon J. Wood, **The Bible and Future Events** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973), p. 18.

4. John M. Mulder, "The Terminal Generation," **Theology Today**, 33 (January 1977):443.

5. Lindsey himself expresses his surprise at the overwhelming response from readers of **The Late Great Planet Earth**. He writes, "The interest also proved to have no geographical boundaries as the book was translated into 31 foreign editions which were circulated in more than 50 countries. I began receiving letters and even phone calls literally from around the world . . . more than 30 million read that book" (**The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon** [Toronto, New York, 1981], pp. 4, 11).

6. Cornelis Vanderwaal, **Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy** (St. Catharines, Canada, 1978), p. 8.

7. Hal Lindsey, **A Study Manual to the Late Great Planet Earth** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971), p. 13. Of all the signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse, Lindsey claims that "the most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel" (**Planet**, p. 53).

8. **Planet**, p. 53; emphasis supplied.
9. **Planet**, p. 53.
10. **Planet**, p. 54.
11. **Planet**, p. 54.
12. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact?" **Future Fiction?** **Christianity Today**, 21 (April 15, 1977):40.
13. **Planet**, p. 54.
14. **Planet**, p. 54.
15. Lindsey emphasizes this conviction by saying, for example, that the last "seven-year period couldn't begin until the Jewish people re-established their nation in their ancient homeland of Palestine" (**Planet**, p. 42).
16. David Webber and N. W. Hutchings, **Is this the Last Century?** (Nashville, 1979), p. 48.
17. **Ibid.**, p. 50.
18. Gary Wilburn, "The Doomsday Chic," **Christianity Today**, 22 (January 27, 1978):22.
19. Hal Lindsey, **The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon** (Toronto, New York, 1980), p. 1.

**CHAPTER
THREE**

**LINDSEY'S
PROPHETIC
JIGSAW
PUZZLE**

The Jigsaw puzzle of End-time events which Lindsey has so imaginatively constructed, includes the following key pieces: the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the repossession of ancient Jerusalem in 1967, the Secret Rapture of the Church by 1981, the seven-year countdown Tribulation events, the visible Return of Christ by 1988. In 1970 Lindsey predicted that since the first two key pieces of the jigsaw had already been placed, the stage was set for "the many adjacent pieces [to] rapidly fall into place."¹

This chapter aims primarily at familiarizing the reader with the key "adjacent pieces" of the jigsaw puzzle, which Lindsey predicted would rapidly fall into place during the decade of the eighties. It will be shown in this and the following chapter that at least five of Lindsey's key predictions have failed to come to pass.

I. THE RAPTURE

The Secret Rapture of the Church is the next key piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw which should have fallen into place by 1981. Consequently, as we shall soon see, this event is also the first noteworthy prediction which has failed to come to pass. Before discussing

the time element of the Secret Rapture, it may be helpful to briefly define this dispensational belief for the sake of those readers unfamiliar with it.

The Secret Snatch. The Rapture, according to Lindsey and dispensationalists in general, is Christ's secret and invisible coming partway to the earth to resurrect the sleeping saints and to transform living believers. Both groups will then be suddenly, secretly and invisibly snatched away from the earth to meet the descending Lord in the air and then they will go to heaven with Christ to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb for seven years.² At the end of the seven-year period, Christ will return again, this time visibly, gloriously and all the way to the earth, to destroy His enemies at the Battle of Armageddon and to set up His terrestrial millennial reign.

Dispensationalists derive the seven-year period from the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27 and from adding together the "forty-two months" and the "1260 days" mentioned in Revelation 11:2-3.³ The latter addition is totally arbitrary, since the two periods of time mentioned in Revelation 11:2,3 are not consecutive but parallel. The first refers to the period of persecution by a hostile power and the second to the Christian witness during such a time of persecution.

Imminent Rapture. The Secret Rapture, which Lindsey prefers to call "the Great Snatch"⁴ because it involves the sudden snatch-

ing away of millions of people, is viewed by dispensationalists as imminent, because its two main preconditions, namely, the reestablishment of the State of Israel and the repossession of ancient Jerusalem, have already taken place.⁵

The sense of imminence of the Rapture is expressed even on bumper stickers such as the one that warns: "IF THE DRIVER DISAPPEARS GRAB THE WHEEL." Lindsey has attempted to capture the drama caused by this sudden disappearance in a series of imaginative descriptions such as this: "There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we've got an invasion from outer space!"⁶

Noisiest Passage. The main reasons for rejecting this belief in a secret, invisible Rapture of the Church are discussed at length in my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**.⁷ In this context it suffices to note that the most notorious description of the Rapture of the Church, which is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, suggests the very opposite of a secret, invisible Coming of Christ.

The text speaks of the Lord descending "from heaven with a **cry** of command, with the archangel's **call**, and with the **sound of the trumpet** of God" (v. 16).⁸ The "cry", "call", "trumpet" and the great gathering of living and resurrected saints hardly suggest a secret, invisible and instantaneous event. On the contrary, this is perhaps the noisiest passage in the Bible, a fact which discredits the notion of a secret Rapture.

Lindsey's Date of the Rapture. Lindsey has the merit not only of having dramatically portrayed the "Great Snatch," but also of having predicted with considerable clarity its approximate time. In 1970 he explicitly predicted that Christ's visible Return would occur "within forty years or so of 1948," that is, by 1988.⁹ Since the secret Rapture of the Church, according to Lindsey and most dispensationalists, must take place seven years before Christ's visible Return, then it should already have taken place by 1981.

In an article entitled "The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey," published in 1975 in **Review and Expositor**, Dale Moody wrote: "If the 'Great Snatch,' as Lindsey repeatedly calls the Rapture, does take place before the Tribulation and by 1981, I will beg forgiveness from Lindsey for doubting his infallibility as we meet in the air."¹⁰

Dale Moody needs not worry about begging forgiveness from Lindsey, because as everybody knows, the "Great Snatch" did not take place by 1981. Instead, **it is Hal Lindsey who should beg forgiveness** from the millions of people he has misled by this noteworthy mistaken prediction.

First Mistaken Prediction. One wonders, How many of the millions who have read Lindsey's books do realize that time has already proved him wrong in his approximate calculation of the time of the Rapture? This first mistaken prediction should be a matter of grave concern to those who believe that the Rapture marks the beginning of "the seven-year

countdown" to Armageddon, during which the major final events are to occur.

If Lindsey was wrong in predicting the time of the Rapture, there is reason to believe that he may be equally mistaken in his predictions of the various Tribulation events to occur during the decade of the 1980's, especially since the latter are dictated by the former. In fact, we shall soon see that time has already proved Lindsey mistaken on at least four of his seven-year countdown predictions. The 1980's are truly proving to be not the countdown to Armageddon, but rather the countdown to the fallacy of Lindsey's prophetic vagaries.

II. TRIBULATIONS EVENTS

The Secret Rapture, which according to Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle should already have occurred by 1981, sets the stage for the "seven-year countdown" (Dan 9:27; Rev 12:2-3) to Armageddon and to Christ's visible Return.

David Webber and Noah Hutchings, two dispensational writers who greatly support Lindsey's prophetic calendar in their book **Is This the Last Century?** (1979), explicitly suggest the possibility "that the Tribulation period will begin in 1981, that Christ will return in 1988" and that the "seven years from 1981 to 1988 will be the Tribulation period."¹¹ These last seven years of human history are viewed by dispensationalists as the most crucial, because the most incredible events of

human history are supposed to take place at this time.

I shall attempt to summarize briefly below the major events of this "seven-year countdown" as far as I have been able to reconstruct them from Lindsey's books.

The Rise of a Roman Antichrist

A Roman Dictator, known as the Roman Antichrist, or, as Lindsey prefers to call him, "The Future Fuehrer,"¹² is to rise to power immediately after the Rapture, out of the ten-nation confederacy of the European Common Market (Dan 7: 23-24; Rev 13). He will sign a protection treaty with the State of Israel which will enable the Israelis to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in three and one-half years and to reinstitute its sacrificial services (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15-16).¹³

This new Temple and its sacrificial services will hardly be inaugurated when the Roman Antichrist will break the covenant with the Jews and will go to the Temple, claiming to be God, disrupting the sacrificial services, and thus accomplishing the abomination of desolation predicted by Daniel (Dan 7:27; cf. Matt 24:15-16).¹⁴ This event marks the beginning of the last three and one-half years of the Antichrist's cruel reign, which, Lindsey writes, "will make the regimes of Hitler, Mao, and Stalin look like Girl Scouts wearing a daisy chain by comparison."¹⁵

Invasion of Israel

Immediately after the profanation of the Temple by the Roman Antichrist, an Arab-African confederacy, headed by Egypt (the King of the South of Daniel 11:40a) will launch an invasion of Israel.¹⁶ Russia and her allies (the King of the North of Daniel 11:40b and Ezekiel 38) will counterattack by sweeping over Arab countries as well as the State of Israel through an amphibious and land invasion of the Middle East.

The Russian invasion of the Middle East will be of short duration, because Ezekiel (38:18-22; 39:3-5) supposedly predicts that the Roman Antichrist will mobilize a vast army consisting of soldiers from the Roman Confederacy (Common Market countries) and from Red China, which will utterly destroy the Russian army in Israel.¹⁷

The Battle of Armageddon

The complete annihilation of both the Arab-African armies and the Russian forces will leave only two great powers to fight for world dominion: "the combined forces of the Western civilization under the leadership of the Roman Dictator and the vast hordes of the Orient probably united under the Red Chinese war machine."¹⁸

The two armies of the two remaining world powers will fight against each other in a final, decisive battle for world control, in the place called "Armageddon," which is located

in the plain of Jezreel, in lower Galilee between the Mediterranean and the Jordan (Rev 16:13, 14, 16). At the climactic moment of the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will return with the Church to destroy all the ungodly and to set up the millennial kingdom of God, which He will rule out of Jerusalem.

An examination of each piece of Lindsey's prophetic puzzle in the light of the Scriptures and of recent developments would take us beyond the limited scope of this booklet. The reader is referred to my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness** for an extensive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation.

The next two chapters will focus primarily on four specific predictions which, like the one of the Rapture already considered, have failed to come to pass. It is my fervent hope that this exposé of a sampling of five specific mistaken predictions made by Lindsey will help many honest Bible students to see the danger of using Biblical prophecies for date-setting sensationalism.

1. **Planet**, p. 58.

2. A comprehensive exposition of the traditional dispensational view of the Rapture is provided by J. F. Walvoord, **The Rapture Question** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957).

3. For example, Lindsey writes: "The apostle John counted out seven years for this period when he spoke of the second half being forty-two months (i.e., $3\frac{1}{2}$ years), and the first half being 1260 days (i.e., $3\frac{1}{2}$ x 360 days, which is the Biblical year) (Revelation 11:2, 3)" (**Planet**, p. 44).

4. Hal Lindsey, **The Rapture: Truth or Consequences** (Toronto, New York, 1983), p. 24.

5. Lindsey expresses this conviction when he writes: "With the Jewish nation reborn in the land of Palestine, ancient Jerusalem once again under total Jewish control for the first time in 2600 years, and talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us" (**Planet**, p. 57).

6. **Planet**, p. 136.

7. See chapter 11, entitled "Mistaken Signs of the Advent Hope." For a most comprehensive and scholarly debate on the issues related to the Rapture, see the symposium **The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984), consisting of challenges and responses prepared by four professors from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer, Douglas J. Moo.

8. Emphasis supplied. Since 1950 more and more evangelical scholars have been abandoning the notion of a secret Rapture of the Church before the seven-year tribulation and embracing historic posttribulationism. The latter holds that the Church will go through the great tribulation, at the end of which Christ will return visibly and

gloriously to resurrect the sleeping saints and to save the living believers. Much of the credit for the resurgence of posttribulationism goes to George E. Ladd, New Testament Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. His respected scholarship, coupled with his commitment to evangelicalism, has caused many to abandon their view of a pretribulation secret Rapture. Some of Ladd's important books on this subject are: **Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1952); **The Blessed Hope** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956); **The Last Things** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978).

9. **Planet**, p. 54.

10. Dale Moody, "The Eschatology of Hal Lindsey," **Review and Expositor**, 72 (Summer, 1975):278.

11. David Webber and Noah W. Hutchings, **Is This the Last Century?** (Nashville, 1979), pp. 49, 50. Similarly, Lindsey writes, "This seven-year period we have called the 'countdown' is a period of unique events. There is more prophecy concerning this period than any other era the Bible describes" (**Planet**, p. 44).

12. "The Future Fuehrer" is the very title of the chapter devoted to the Roman Antichrist (**Planet**, pp. 98-113).

13. **Planet**, pp. 56, 109, 110, 151, 152.

14. **Planet**, pp. 56, 152, 153.

15. **Planet**, p. 110.

16. **Planet**, pp. 77, 153.

17. Lindsey even supplies two charts to illustrate Russian invasion of the Middle East and the attack against the Russian army by the Roman Confederacy (**Planet**, pp. 155, 159).

18. **Planet**, p. 162.

**CHAPTER
FOUR**

**LINDSEY'S
PERPLEXING
PUZZLE**

Lindsey's jigsaw puzzle of the seven-year countdown events, briefly described in the previous chapter, raises at least two major, perplexing questions to be addressed in this chapter: (1) How can Lindsey, and a host of dispensationalists with him, construct from Biblical prophecies such an imaginative scenario of events to take place within the short span of the last seven years of human history? (2) Since, as we have seen, Lindsey emphatically predicts, even by the title of one of his books, that the decade of 1980s is the countdown to Armageddon, are the key pieces of his prophetic jigsaw puzzle falling into place in this decade according to his prophetic timetable?

I. TWO MISTAKEN PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

The answer to the first question is to be found in the dispensational interpretation of Biblical prophecies, which is based on two determinative principles, known as (1) "consistent literalism" and (2) a permanent distinction between Israel and the Church.

Consistent Literalism. On the basis of the principle of consistent literalism, Old Testament prophecies regarding the restoration of

Israel, the rebuilding of the temple, and the reinstitution of animal sacrifices must be fulfilled in a literal way to the Jewish nation in Palestine during the "terminal generation" which began in 1948, and especially during the last seven-year countdown.

It is impossible within the limited scope of this booklet to examine the two determinative principles of dispensational prophetic interpretation. The reader is referred to my extensive analysis of these principles in my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**.

My study shows that the principle of consistent literalism fails adequately to interpret Biblical prophecy, because it ignores the progressive nature of God's revelation; it disregards the Messianic and expanding fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; and it contradicts itself through its inconsistent interpretation of Biblical prophecies.

Israel and the Church. On the basis of the second principle of a permanent distinction between Israel and the Church, many Old Testament prophecies regarding the Jews, must be fulfilled at the end of time in and through a literal Israel, because what the Scripture says about Israel cannot be applied to the Church and vice versa.

Regarding the second principle, it must be said that though the New Testament sometimes does speak of Jews in distinction from Gentiles, it never teaches or implies that God has in mind a separate future for Israel in distinction to that planned for the Church.

In the New Testament the Church lives, not as a new olive tree, but as new olive branches ingrafted into the one olive tree of the Israel of God (Rom 11:17-24). The future of Israel is seen in the New Testament, not in terms of a millennial political kingdom in Palestine, but in terms of everlasting blessedness shared together with the redeemed of all ages in a restored new earth.¹

II. FOUR PREDICTIONS THAT FAILED

1. The Rise of the Roman Antichrist

The second question, whether or not the tribulation events of the seven-year-countdown are being fulfilled in the decade of the 1980's, is simple to answer: no sign of their fulfillment is yet in sight, even though we are already at midpoint through the eighties.

We already noted that Lindsey's prediction of the secret Rapture of the Church failed to come to pass by 1981. This first mistaken prediction by Lindsey is closely related to the four other mistaken predictions to be considered below.

The second of Lindsey's mistaken predictions regards the meteoric rise of a Roman Antichrist out of the ten nations of the European Common Market. This political dictator and religious impostor was to rise to power immediately after the Rapture of the Church by 1981. In 1970 Lindsey wrote that believing Christians are "the restrainer" of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12, who are holding "back the rise of this World Dictator."² The Rapture of believers

by 1981 was to remove the "restrainer" which was in turn to enable the Roman Antichrist to exert "power and might . . . over the entire world."³

A Possible Candidate. In 1970 Lindsey saw a possible candidate for the role of Roman Antichrist in the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, "newspaper editor and author of **The American Challenge.**"⁴ The reason for this choice was that Servan-Schreiber at that time was "furiously trying to push a U.S. of Europe" and because he wanted "to become its first president."⁵

This sensational prediction of Lindsey has miserably failed, like the previous one about the Rapture. Not only has no political-religious dictator appeared in Western Europe during the early part of the eighties, but also the chances of his imminent arising are extremely remote. The reasons are of different natures and could be summarized in the following four points.

Fragile Economic Community. First, the European Common Market is not a strong political federation of nations comparable to the federation of the 50 American States. On the contrary, it is a very fragile economic community of nations whose governing body does not dictate the internal political affairs of the ten nations it represents. Thus, it is inconceivable that a political-religious dictator could ever arise out of the governing body of such a fragile economic community that

is presently fighting for its very survival.

Political Fragmentation. Second, it is unimaginable for anyone familiar with the political fragmentation existing in most of the ten nations belonging to the European Common Market, that a political dictator could ever succeed today in dominating all these ten nations without a bloody resistance. In my own country of Italy, for example, where we have more than a dozen political parties and where coalition governments have fallen dozens of times since 1945, it is inconceivable that all political parties would suddenly support a European political-religious dictator.

Lindsey and dispensationalists fail to recognize that the European nations are not like the 50 American States, which are very much united linguistically, culturally, and politically. Such a unity does not exist among European nations, where each one is keen to preserve its own linguistic, cultural, and political identity.

If nations such as England, France, Belgium, Holland, and Poland fought heroically against Hitler's attempt to dominate them, there is every reason to believe that they are prepared to fight again even more heroically today against anyone making a similar attempt to control them. This is especially true in view of the struggle Europeans have waged during the last forty years for greater political and civil liberties.

American Intervention. Third, it is diffi-

cult to perceive how a Roman Dictator could succeed in dominating ten European nations without being challenged either by the U.S.A. or by Russia or by both. Lindsey discounts the possibility of an American intervention against the Roman Antichrist because he predicted in 1970 that "according to the prophetic outlook, the United States will cease being the leader of the West and will probably become in some way a part of the new European sphere of power . . . It is certain that the leadership of the West must shift to Rome, in its revived form, and if the U.S. is still around at the time, it will not be the power it now is."⁶

On the basis of Ezekiel's statement "I will send fire--upon those who dwell securely in the coastland . . . "(39:6; Amplified), Lindsey wrote in 1970, "It is clear that the U.S. cannot be the leader of the West in the future."⁷

The developments of the last fifteen years have clearly proved Lindsey totally wrong in this important prediction. Not only has the U.S. retained and strengthened its position of leadership of the West, but there are also no indications that the leadership of the West has begun to shift toward a revived Rome. This clearly means that another key piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle has failed to fall into place.

European Secularism. Fourth, it is hard to imagine how today's Europeans, who are predominantly secularistic and humanistic in their outlook (less than 10% are churchgoers), could

suddenly become worshipers of a Roman Dictator who claims to be a divine being. This was conceivable in ancient Rome when the emperor was often worshipped as god but hardly today when even papal directives are largely ignored by the majority of European Catholics. In Italy, for example, in spite of papal threats against those who would vote in favor of divorce and abortion, Catholics in recent referenda did vote overwhelmingly in favor of both practices, thus openly defying papal injunctions.

The obvious conclusion that emerges from the above considerations is that not only has Lindsey's Roman Antichrist failed to appear as predicted in the early 1980's, but also that the possibility of his imminent arising out of the present political and religious climate of Western Europe is extremely remote. This means that a second vital piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw has failed to fall into place.

2. The Rebuilding of the Tribulation Temple

Closely related to the Rapture and the rise of the Roman Antichrist, there is a third mistaken prediction which Lindsey made regarding the rebuilding of the tribulation Temple. The Roman Antichrist, predicted to appear in the early eighties, was supposed to make the rebuilding of the Temple possible by making "'a strong covenant' [Dan 9:27] with the Israelis, guaranteeing their safety and protection."⁸

The Time of the Rebuilding. According to most dispensationalists, the Jerusalem Temple must be rebuilt by the middle of the last prophetic week of Daniel 9:27. Thomas S. McCall, a leading dispensationalist, emphatically states: "As far as the time is concerned, it has been dogmatically stated that the temple must be rebuilt by the middle of the tribulation. This is all that is revealed."⁹

In Lindsey's prophetic timetable the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple was to be completed by the middle of the 1980's, that is, at mid-point of the seven-year-countdown which terminates by 1988. The treaty of protection which the Roman Antichrist was to make with Israel immediately after the Rapture, was to enable the Israelites to rebuild their Temple in three and one-half years and to reinstitute the sacrificial services (Dan 9:26-27; Matt 24:15-16; Rev 11:1-2). In 1970 Lindsey wrote that with the "talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us."¹⁰

Rumors of the Rebuilding. One wonders, What has happened to this "**most important prophetic sign**" of Christ's imminent return during the last 15 years? Has the rebuilding of the great Temple already begun in any form? To my knowledge the only fabrication that has begun is not that of the Temple but of stories about it. **Christianity Today** wrote in December 1967 that "A few years ago reports were widely circulated that a prefabricated temple for Jerusalem was seen at a port somewhere in Florida."¹¹

An article appeared in August 1967 in the British magazine **The Christian and Christianity Today** reporting news "received from authoritative sources in Sellersburg, Indiana" that "five hundred railcar loads of stone from Bedford [Indiana], considered to be among the finest building stone in the world, are being freighted pre-cut to exact specifications, and one consignment has already been dispatched to Israel. Shipments are being handled by Pier 26 in New York."¹²

The entire story has been flatly denied, both by the Israeli government and by industry sources in Indiana. Such a fanciful fabrication reflects the unusual interest of some dispensationalists in helping God to fulfill what they believe to be a crucial End-time prophecy.

The belief of an End-time rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple is based primarily on two texts (Dan 9:26-27 and Matt 24:14-15) which, as I have shown elsewhere, offer no support whatsoever to such a notion.¹³ Besides being devoid of any prophetic support, this belief is discredited also by crucial theological and practical considerations.

Theological Objections. Theologically, the notion of a literal rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple during the tribulation, is contradicted by the New Testament teaching regarding the fulfillment and termination of the Temple's services at and through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross (Matt 27:51; Heb 9:11-14; 8:13).

The only new temple of which the New Testament speaks is the one being built, not during a future seven-year tribulation upon Mount Zion, but in the present "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:20; RSV).

Practical Objections. Practically, the possibility of rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple on its ancient site is negated by several obstacles. The most serious of these is the presence of the Moslem Dome of the Rock and the nearby Al Aksa Mosque, which appear to be located on the very ancient Temple site. Since for Judaism the only permissible location for the Temple is its ancient site (Deut 12:10-14), the Dome of the Rock would need to be removed before any rebuilding could begin. Such an action would precipitate an Arab holy war against Israel, besides violating the Israelis' commitment to respect all the sacred sites of all religions.

Another practical objection is the prevailing belief among Orthodox Jews that only the Messiah can rebuild the Temple. Since the Messiah has not yet come, Jews are not at liberty to rebuild the Temple.¹⁴ Moreover, before the Jews could consider rebuilding the Temple, they would need to accept the notion of reviving sacrifices--a notion which most Jews find repulsive and abhorrent. Modern Judaism views the sacrificial system as an ancient and outmoded form of religious expression which has

been replaced by repentance, prayer, good deeds, Torah-study, charity and justice.¹⁵

The above considerations suffice to show that Lindsey's prediction of the rebuilding of the Temple is a third key piece of his prophetic jigsaw which has failed to fall into place by the early part of the 1980's. Not only has the ancient Temple not been rebuilt, but also it seems very unlikely that its rebuilding could take place in the near future on account of the crucial theological and practical objections mentioned above.

3. Egypt: The King of the South

A fourth mistaken piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle, which is supposed to fit right next to that of the rebuilding of the Temple, is the invasion of Israel by an Arab-African confederacy. Initially this confederacy is to be supported by Russia and headed by Egypt, the prophetic King of the South, spoken of in Daniel 11:40. In 1970 Lindsey calculated that this invasion would occur sometime in the middle of the eighties, that is, immediately after the inauguration of the Jerusalem Temple and its profanation by the Roman Antichrist.¹⁶

Lindsey predicted that Egypt, "the king of the South" of Daniel 11:40a, would succeed in uniting "Arabs and the black Africans into a 'third world force.'"¹⁷ Russia would facilitate this development by arming and equipping many Arab and African nations. At the head of this Pan Arab-African confederacy, Egypt was to

launch an invasion of Israel. This was to prove to be a fatal mistake because the Russians, "the king of the North" of Daniel 11: 40b, "will double-cross the Arabs, Egyptians, and Africans, and for a short while conquer the Middle East."¹⁸

The Basis of Lindsey's Prediction. This prediction was obviously inspired by the leadership role which Egypt enjoyed under Nasser, in whom Lindsey saw "the King of the South" of Daniel 11:40.¹⁹ Furthermore, by interpreting "Put" and "Cush" mentioned in Daniel 11:43, as representing "the black Africans and African Arabs, respectively," he predicted that "'black African' and 'Arab-African' countries will be involved with Egypt" first in invading Israel and later in suffering defeat at the hands of the Russians.²⁰

The fact that Nasser was already in poor health in 1970 did not deter Lindsey from predicting that Egypt would become the leader of a "Third World Force." On the contrary, he explicitly wrote: "Whether he [Nasser] continues to lead Egypt, or is replaced by some other leader or is dead by the time this is published, the clearly predictable course of the Middle East will not be changed . . . Current events in the Middle East have prepared the stage for Egypt's last act in the great drama which will climax with the finale, Christ's personal return to earth."²¹

What Went Wrong? Since fifteen years have already passed from the time Lindsey made this

bold prediction, it is legitimate to ask, Has Egypt become during this time the leader of a "third world force" consisting of Arab and African nations? Moreover, has Egypt ever attempted during the past fifteen years to organize a Pan-Arab and African army to launch an invasion of Israel? The answer to these questions is self-evident. This mistaken prediction represents a fourth key piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw which has failed to fall into place.

One wonders, How could Lindsey make so many grossly mistaken predictions? The answer is quite simple. His predictions were shaped more by current trends than by the Scripture. The political leadership of Egypt in 1970 was read back by Lindsey into Biblical prophecies. This arbitrary method of interpreting prophecy can only lead to disappointments, besides undermining the value and permanent relevance of prophetic messages.

A New King of the South? In 1970, when Egypt enjoyed the position of leadership among Arab nations, it was feasible for Lindsey to predict that Egypt would eventually succeed in uniting Arab and African nations against their common enemy, Israel. History, however, sometimes takes unexpected turns. This has been particularly true in the case of Egypt. Very few mortals could have foreseen in 1970 that within ten years Egypt would lose the support of many Arab and African nations by ending 30 years of war with Israel through the signing of an official peace treaty on March 26, 1979 and the establishing of diplomatic relations with Israel.

In the light of recent developments, it is obvious that today Egypt can no longer play the role of "the king of the South" who is to lead an Arab-African confederacy against Israel. This is particularly true in view of the prevailing tension among Arab nations and the outright war between Iran and Iraq. Before the Arab nations can unite against Israel, they must stop fighting among themselves.

It is evident, then, that another key piece of Hal Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw (the fourth in our count), has failed to fall into place. What this means is that if Lindsey were to rewrite **The Late Great Planet Earth** today, he would obviously look elsewhere for the prophetic king of the South--possibly to Libya, in view of the latter's hatred for Israel and diplomatic ties with Moscow. This kind of arbitrary interpretation of prophecies can only aid the cause of those critics who are only too glad to capitalize on such vagaries to caricature and ridicule the whole belief in a personal Return of Christ to this earth.

4. Russia: The King of the North

A fifth mistaken piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle can be seen in his prediction, made in 1970, that Russia, the King of the North of Daniel 11:40b and Ezekiel 38, would soon "arm and equip a vast confederacy" of African and Arab nations, which would join together in a common invasion of Israel.²² Lindsey explicitly predicted in 1970 that in "the next few years" Northern Africa would become "solidly pro-Soviet" and that "many of the

African nations will be united and allied with the Russians in the invasion of Israel. This is in accord with Daniel's graphic description of this invasion (Daniel 11:36-45)."²³

The Invasion of Israel. Lindsey warned his readers in 1970 especially to "watch the actions of Iran in relation to Russia and the United Arab Republic."²⁴ On the basis of Ezekiel 38:5-6 he predicted that Iran would soon "join the United Arab Republic in its hostility against Israel" and that the Russians would "gain footholds in Iran . . . in order to mount the large-scale invasion [of Israel] predicted by Ezekiel."²⁵

The invasion of Israel, according to Lindsey's prophetic calculations, was to take place at mid-point of the seven-year countdown (Dan 9:24), "almost immediately after the [Roman] Antichrist declares himself to be God" and profanes the newly inaugurated Jerusalem Temple (2 Thess 2:4; Matt 24:15).²⁶ Since the seven-year countdown, for Lindsey, terminates by the end of the decade of the eighties, the invasion of Israel should thus be taking place now in 1985.

This invasion, as Lindsey graphically portrays by a chart, is to take place in two phases. First, the pro-Soviet "Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (King of the South) launches an invasion of Israel."²⁷ Then, as Daniel 11:42, 43 indicates, wrote Lindsey in 1970, "the Russian block will double-cross the Arabs, Egyptians, and Africans, and for a short time conquer the Middle East."²⁸

A Prediction That Failed. The developments of the last fifteen years could not have proved more forcefully the fallacies of Lindsey's predictions. What has happened, in most cases, is the very opposite of what Lindsey predicted would happen. Africa has become, not "solidly pro-Soviet," but less pro-Soviet, as several of its countries have moved away from Soviet influence and turned instead to the West for economic and military assistance. No Arab-African confederacy has ever come into existence. No alliance has ever developed between Iran and Egypt; on the contrary, the relations between the two countries have worsened during the last few years.

Russia has lost rather than gained footholds in Iran. No Arab-African invasion of Israel ever took place by 1985. On the contrary, Arab nations, such as Egypt and Jordan, are for the first time in our generation talking peace with Israel. This development is devastating to Lindsey's countdown which requires war. No Russian "amphibious and land invasion of Israel"²⁹ has happened in the first half of the eighties nor is it likely to happen in the latter half. It is evident that another key piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw (the fifth in our count) has failed to fall into place.

Russia in Prophecy? How could Lindsey make so many grossly mistaken predictions in 1970? The answer is simple. His predictions were shaped more by the events of 1970's than by the Scriptures. He used the latter to support the

former. With great imagination, Lindsey read into Biblical prophecies his expected Russian invasion of Israel. Such a method of Biblical interpretation only serves to expose the message of the prophets to the ridicule of the critics.

A good example of Lindsey's irresponsible interpretation of Biblical prophecy is the way Lindsey fits Russia into his End-time prophetic jigsaw, by interpreting Ezekiel's references to Gog, Magog, Rosh ("Russia"), Meschech ("Moscow"), and Tubal (Ezek 38:2-3), as explicit predictions about modern Russia and its invasion of Israel. He never stops to consider questions such as these: How could Ezekiel be speaking of modern Russia when such a nation did not exist at his time? How could Ezekiel mean **"the city of Moscow"**³⁰ by "Meshech" when Moscow was not established until the 12th century A.D.?

Furthermore, how can Ezekiel's references to the "uttermost north" apply to "only one nation," namely, "the U.S.S.R.,"³¹ when, as T. Boersma points out, "with respect to Palestine, the area southeast of the Black Sea is certainly 'the uttermost north'?"³² What meaning would Ezekiel's message have for his immediate readers, if he wrote about geographical places and people to come into existence 2600 years later?

Lindsey's Problem. A major cause of Lindsey's problem is his failure to recognize that geographical locations mentioned by Ezekiel cannot be identified with names found in a

contemporary world map, but rather must be sought in a map of the ancient Near East. Any good map of the ancient Near East locates most of the places mentioned by Ezekiel, not in Russia, but in what today is Turkey.³³

Moreover, the New Testament applies Gog and Magog, not to modern Russia, but to the hordes of the wicked at the close of the millenium (Rev 20:7-8). Ezekiel's battle of Gog and Magog against God's people (Ezek 38 and 39) takes place in the New Testament, not before Christ's Return, but at the close of the millenium when "the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog" will gather for battle against "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev 20:8-9). Why does Lindsey ignore such an explicit New Testament interpretation of Ezekiel's prophecy?

Lindsey turns Biblical prophecies into a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces can be identified only by those who accept his clue. This method reduces the Gospel into a secret teaching which only few clever initiates can understand. "In the final analysis," as Cornelis Vanderwall keenly observes, "Lindsey's reading of Scripture is a new form of Christian Gnosticism."³⁴

The method used by Lindsey to raise people's expectations with his predictions supposed to be "more up-to-date than tomorrow's newspaper,"³⁵ but which are just as quickly outdated, only leads to disappointment and disillusionment. If this irresponsible method of using the Scripture is not vigorously challenged, there will be an ever-increasing

number of puzzled Christians who ultimately will doubt, if not totally abandon, their Advent Hope.

1. For a most perceptive and comprehensive analysis of the dispensational principles of prophetic interpretation, see Hans K. LaRondelle, **The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation** (Berrien Springs: Michigan, Andrews University Press, 1983).

2. **Planet**, pp. 110; cf. pp. 151, 152.

3. **Planet**, p. 110.

4. **Planet**, p. 95.

5. **Planet**, p. 95.

6. **Planet**, pp. 95-96. Commenting on the statement he wrote in 1970 in **The Late Great Planet Earth** that "as the United States loses power, western Europe will be forced to unite and become the standard-bearer," Lindsey writes in 1980 with a sense of pride: "I knew this would happen" (**The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon**, p. 107). It is surprising that Lindsey would even congratulate himself, since Europe hardly became politically united or militarily stronger than the U.S.A during the decade of the seventies.

7. **Planet**, p. 161.

8. **Planet**, p. 152.

9. Thomas S. McCall, "Problems in Rebuilding the Tribulation Temple," **Bibliotheca Sacra** 129 (January, 1972): 79.

10. **Planet**, p. 57.

11. Editorial, "Israel: Things to Come," **Christianity Today**, 12 (December 22, 1967):35.

12. **The Christian and Christianity Today** (August 4, 1967):7-8.

13. See chapter 11 of **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**.

14. See A. Cohen, **Everyman's Talmud** (New York, 1949), pp. 354-355; Moses Bottenweiser, "Messiah," **The Jewish Encyclopedia**, VIII (1904):511.

15. Emil G. Hirsch explains: "Reform Judaism omits from the prayer-book reference to the sacrifices, sanguinary ceremonies being repugnant to its religious consciousness" ("Sacrifices," **The Jewish Encyclopedia**, X [1905]: 628).

16. Lindsey explicitly places the invasion of Israel by "the Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt (King of the South) . . . almost immediately after the Antichrist declares himself to be God . . . and in the Temple proclaims himself to be God incarnate (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matthew 24:15)" (**Planet**, 153).

17. **Planet**, p. 79.

18. **Planet**, p. 158.

19. Lindsey's conviction was based on the fact that "Nasser believes that he can unite the Arabs to lead the resurrection of all underprivileged nations into a mighty third world force. He envisions himself as the one to lead the nations of Africa, black and Arab, to unity" (**Planet**, p. 75).

20. **Planet**, p. 10.

21. **Planet**, pp. 76-77.

22. **Planet**, p. 71.

23. **Planet**, pp. 68, 69. Referring to Northern Africa, Lindsey wrote in 1970: "As we watch this area in the next few years we shall see indications that it is destined to join the southern sphere of power which will attack Israel along with the 'King of the North'" (**Planet**, p. 69).

24. **Planet**, p. 68.

25. **Planet**, p. 67.

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26. **Planet**, p. 153.
 27. See chart one, **Planet**, p. 155.
 28. **Planet**, p. 158. See chart two, **Planet**, p. 159.
 29. **Planet**, p. 157.
 30. **Planet**, p. 65.
 31. **Planet**, p. 66.
 32. T. Boersma, **Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . . An Evaluation of Hal Lindsey's Writing** (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 116.
 33. For a concise and informative discussion of the geographic names mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39, see T. Boersma (n. 32), pp. 113-125.
 34. Cornelis Vanderwaal, **Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy** (St. Catherines, Canada, 1978), p. 55.
 35. Hal Lindsey, **There Is a New World Coming** (London, 1974), p. 7.

**CHAPTER
FIVE**

**LINDSEY:
A HERO
OR A BUM?**

One wonders, How is Lindsey feeling today after seeing that at least five of his key predictions have failed to come to pass by the middle of the eighties? In an interview reported in **Christianity Today** in April 1977, Ward Gasque asked Lindsey, "But what if you're wrong?" Lindsey replied: "Well, there's just a split second's difference between a hero and a bum. I didn't ask to be a hero, but I guess I have become one in the Christian community. So I accept it. But if I'm wrong about this, I guess I'll become a bum."¹

By shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Sorry, I was a bum!" Lindsey hardly reflects a genuine pastoral concern for the millions whom he has misled by his books. Such a lighthearted admission will not help them to pick up the pieces of their disillusionment and to come to a true understanding of Biblical prophecy. More important still, there are no indications that Lindsey is prepared to face the fact that he has "become a bum."

Personally, I have not found a single statement in Lindsey's recent books expressing regret for having misled millions of readers through his mistaken predictions. On the contrary, there are indications that Lindsey has chosen to minimize his mistakes by disengaging himself from his earlier predictions and to maximize his popularity by emphasizing personal salvation and preparation for the Rapture.²

Recalculating the Second Advent. In an address delivered in Toronto in 1979, Lindsey explained that the budding fig tree includes not only the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, but also the repossession of Old Jerusalem in 1967.³ This new inclusion enables Lindsey to gain another 19 years. This represents a clear shift away from his fixed point of 1948.

In 1970 Lindsey wrote in **The Late Great Planet Earth** that "a generation in the Bible is something like forty years,"⁴ but in 1977 he said, "I don't know how long a Biblical generation is. Perhaps somewhere between sixty and eighty years."⁵ It is surprising how soon Lindsey forgot the forty years length of a Biblical generation--a fact that was so crucial to him in 1970 to establish that Christ will return "within forty years or so of 1948."

Lindsey is endeavoring to buy extra time also by shifting his emphasis from the fixed date of 1948, to floating events occurring in our time. It is noteworthy that in his latest book, **The Rapture: Truth or Consequences** (1983), Lindsey makes no mention of the rebirth of Israel in 1948--an event which he discusses at great length in his previous books, calling it "the center of the entire prophetic forecast."⁶ Instead, now he uses indefinite time references such as, "We are on the verge of this period [tribulation], which will last seven years," or, "In all probability, most of the people reading this book will live to experience the answer" to whether the rapture will occur before, during, or after the tribulation.⁷

The combination of bold assertions and covert revisions is a common symptom of the painful awareness caused by unfulfilled predictions. Unfortunately, many uncritical believers fail to recognize this symptom and keep on believing the new revised predictions, even if the previous ones have already proved to be false.

Impersonal Events or Personal Savior. Lindsey's excessive preoccupation with spying out the future by constructing a prophetic jigsaw puzzle of last-day events can affect adversely both Christian faith and practice. It can lead persons to look for impersonal events rather than for a personal Saviour.

To base the conviction of the imminent Return of Christ on the datable world of events rather than on the undatable reality of God's love means to be waiting, not for a personal Savior, but for impersonal events, such as the establishment of the State of Israel, the repossession of Jerusalem, the rise of the Roman Antichrist, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, the Arab-African invasion of Israel, the destruction of the Russian army by the Roman Dictator, etc.

Waiting for events such as these to happen can cause feverish excitement and sore disappointments, both of which undermine the reality and value of the Advent Hope. The purpose of the prophetic signs of the Second Advent, as we shall see in the next chapter, is **not to pinpoint** God's specific timetable of events leading to the End, **but to point** to the certainty of Christ's Return and the need for constant readiness.

1. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" **Christianity Today**, 21 (April 15, 1977):40.

2. John M. Mulder perceptively points out that "Like Oral Roberts, Lindsey is going respectable . . . In contrast to his earlier books, he is now more concerned with individual salvation and morality" ("The Terminal Generation," **Theology Today**, 33 [January, 1977]:443).

3. Stanley D. Walters, "Hal Lindsey: Recalculating the Second Coming," **The Christian Century**, 96 (September 12, 1979):839.

4. **Planet**, p. 54.

5. W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" **Christianity Today**, 21 (April 15, 1977):40.

6. Hal Lindsey, **The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon** (Toronto, New York, 1980), p. 11.

7. Hal Lindsey, **The Rapture: Truth or Consequences** (Toronto, New York, 1983), pp. 1, 23.

**CHAPTER
SIX**

**THE
NATURE
OF THE
ADVENT
SIGNS**

Without signs hope withers. It is hard to keep on hoping to see a friend again who for many years has given no signs of being alive. Christ was well aware of this human need for signs to nourish hope and thus He gave numerous precursory signs of His Second Advent. These signs are generally known as the Advent signs or the signs of the times.

Throughout the centuries there have been Christians who have looked for the fulfillment of the Advent signs in the events of their time. Some Christians, like Lindsey, have studied the Advent signs to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to Christ's Return. We have seen, for example, how Lindsey finds in Christ's reference to the budding of the fig tree (Matt 24:32-35) the time clue to calculate the approximate year of the Second Advent, namely, by 1988.

The attempts which have been made by people such as Hal Lindsey to derive from the study of Advent signs a rather precise timetable of End-time events raise the dual questions of the **nature** and **function** of the Advent signs. These two questions will be addressed in the next two chapters where we shall examine first the nature of the Advent signs and then their function. The aim of the next two chapters is to foster a legitimate use and appreciation for the precursory signs of Christ's Return.

I. THE GENERIC NATURE OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

The signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse (which include false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, worldwide Gospel proclamation, tribulation) are all signs which cannot be precisely dated or fixed. Christ did not say, for example, when an earthquake completely destroys San Francisco, or when famine causes the death of hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia or Cambodia, "then you know that my Return is near."

Constant Relevance. On the contrary, Christ chose to give signs of a generic nature which could find a degree of fulfillment in every age. The reason for this is quite evident. Believers in every age need to see the Advent signs in order to experience the reassurance of the certainty and imminence of Christ's Coming.

Past and present misguided attempts to lift the veil of secrecy from God's future must not detract from the legitimate contemporizing of the Advent signs. Faith and hope in the soon-Coming of the Lord can only remain living expectations if they are sustained by reassuring signs.

II. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION OF ADVENT SIGNS

The justification for contemporizing the Advent signs can be found in the example of Christ Himself who related the signs of His Return directly to His disciples: "Take heed that no one leads **you** astray . . . **you** will hear of

wars and rumors of wars; see that **you** are not alarmed . . . they will deliver **you** up to tribulation . . . when **you** see the desolating sacrilege . . . I have told **you** beforehand. So, if they say to **you**, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out . . . when **you** see all these things, **you** know that he is near, at the very gates . . . watch therefore, for **you** do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:4, 6, 9, 15, 25, 26, 33, 42; RSV).

Obviously the "**you**" means not only Christ's immediate twelve disciples, but also all His future followers. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that Christ expected His Apostles to be the first to see the fulfillment of the Advent signs. This fact indicates that the signs given by Christ are relevant to believers living in every age.

III. CONTEMPORARY RECOGNITION OF ADVENT SIGNS

Paul's Perception. New Testament believers recognized the contemporary application of the Advent signs. Paul, for example, saw in such signs as the Gospel's proclamation to the known world (Rom 15:19-24) and the rebellion and lawlessness being "already at work" (2 Thess 2:3, 7; 2 Tim 3:1-5), indications that "the appointed time has grown very short . . . the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (1 Cor 7:29, 31; Rom 13:12).

Peter's Perception. Peter saw in "the fiery ordeal" that was about to come upon the Christians (1 Pet 4:12)--presumably an allusion

to the Neronian persecution--a sign that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4:7).

John's Perception. John perceived in the contemporary arising of antichrists--that is, false teachers who denied the Messiahship and the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:20)--the sign that "it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). He draws this conclusion explicitly when he says: "You have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

James' Perception. James regarded as an Advent sign the social injustice experienced by laborers who were paid unfair wages, or sometimes not paid at all by greedy rich landowners (James 5:1- 9). He urges Christians to be patient because "the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the doors" (James 4:9).

IV. DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

The above sampling of testimonies indicates that though New Testament writers share a common conviction that the Advent signs were being fulfilled in their own time, they derived such a conviction from observing different religious, political, and social developments of their times.

This fact suggests that no hard-and-fast rule can be drawn regarding which specific signs are being fulfilled at any given time or

at different historical periods. What Paul perceived as being a sign of the times may not have been the same event that impressed John or, later on, Luther, you, or me.

A Sign of Divine Wisdom. This conclusion is obviously unacceptable to persons like Lindsey who view the Advent signs as unique events which are to take place only immediately before the Second Advent and not throughout the entire course of Christian history. Such a view ignores the fact that Jesus Himself, as noted earlier, contemporized the signs of His Coming by relating them directly to His disciples and His generation.

Moreover, is it not reflective of divine wisdom to have given signs which could find a degree of fulfillment in every age? Have not the Advent signs helped believers throughout history to face trials and sufferings with the assurance that ". . . the strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle, The next the victor's song"?

V. INTENSIFICATION OF THE ADVENT SIGNS

To acknowledge the existence of the Advent signs throughout Christian history does not mean to deny their intensification before Christ's Return. The Scripture teaches, as I have shown in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 of my larger study, **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**, that the conflict between the forces of God and the forces of Satan will intensify as we draw closer to the Second

Advent. Apostacy, lawlessness, and rebellion will increase; suffering and persecution will culminate in a "great tribulation"; the Gospel will be preached as a testimony to all the nations. The intensification of these and other Advent signs offers to believers the assurance that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4:7).

The conclusion, then, is that the Advent signs are of a generic nature, designed to discourage Lindsey's type of date-setting sensationalism and to encourage believers throughout Christian history to look forward to the final consummation of redemption to be accomplished by the Coming of the Lord. To appreciate more fully the relevance of the Advent signs for our life today, we shall consider in the next chapter "the function of the Advent Signs."

**CHAPTER
SEVEN**

**THE
FUNCTION
OF THE
ADVENT
SIGNS**

Have you ever experienced the feeling of being lost, perhaps while driving on unfamiliar country roads? You eagerly looked for landmarks or road signs to determine your location on the map, but there were no recognizable signs in sight. It is hard to describe the sense of hopelessness that comes from the awareness of being lost, of not being able to reach one's destination as expected.

Recognizable signs are needed to nourish our hope to reach our destination. This is true whether we travel by car on the highways or by faith on the Christian way to the Kingdom. The aim of this chapter is briefly to examine four vital functions of the Advent signs.

I. ADVENT SIGNS NOURISH HOPE AND FAITH

Signs Withheld. A first vital function of the Advent signs is to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers. Signs and faith are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The determining factor is the attitude of belief or unbelief of the person viewing the signs. Christ withheld signs from "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matt 12:39) because no amount of signs can generate faith in an incredulous and rebellious heart.

Signs Given. Signs, however, serve to strengthen the faith and nourish the hope of those who believe. Thus, after the resurrection Christ presented Himself to His disciples "by many proofs" (Acts 1:3). Those proofs would not automatically convince hardened unbelievers, but did strengthen the faith of the believing disciples.

The attitude of belief or unbelief determines the value and meaning of the Advent signs. To an unbeliever signs are meaningless because he fails to perceive in them the outworking of divine grace or judgment. To a believer, however, signs are meaningful because they provide constant reassurance that God is at work, bringing human history to its consummation. How do the Advent signs strengthen the faith of the believer? The subsequent sections endeavor to answer this very question.

II. ADVENT SIGNS POINT TO THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION

A Sense of Reassurance. A second important function of the Advent signs is to point forward to the imminent consummation of redemption to be realized at the Second Coming of Christ. To use an analogy, we could compare the Advent signs to **highway markers** which give the number or the name of the highway, but **not** to **highway mileposts** which specify the exact distance to the nearest town.

When I drive from Chicago to Detroit, I know that I need to stay on Interstate 94 to reach my destination. Every time the Interstate

94 sign appears, I am reassured to be on the right highway to my destination. In the same way the frequent appearances of the Advent signs during the course of history have served to reassure Christians of journeying on the right way "to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10).

A Sense of Progression. The Advent signs offer to the believer the assurance, not only of journeying on the right way to the Kingdom, but also of drawing near to the end of the journey. The "near," however, is never defined in terms of months or years, because the signs given by Christ are like highway markers and not like highway mileposts.

The believer who sees the appearance of the Advent signs is constantly assured of drawing nearer and nearer to the end of the journey, though he can never measure the exact distance to the End. The Advent signs **point toward** the nearness of the Advent **without pin-pointing** its exact time. The latter is a secret which God has reserved for Himself (Mark 13:32).

In conclusion, the Advent signs enable believers to experience a sense of certainty and imminence, that is, the assurance of journeying on the right way and of progressing toward the end of the journey when the meeting with the Lord will take place.

III. ADVENT SIGNS CALL FOR PREPARATION, NOT CALCULATION

A third important function of the Advent signs is to call for constant readiness. A prayer I have often heard runs something like this: "Lord, help us to be ready for the day when Thou shalt come." Unintentionally, this prayer reflects a misconception, namely, that what is important in order to be saved is to be ready to receive the Lord, not necessarily today, but on the day when He will come.

Preparation, not Calculation. The function of the Advent signs is to encourage, not calculation, prognostication, procrastination, but rather constant preparation and watchfulness. If the intention of Bible prophecies was to enable believers to know the exact moment when major events will occur, then these events would have been given in a precise, incontrovertible way. But this has never been the function of prophecy.

Many prophecies were given by Old Testament prophets regarding the First Advent of the Messiah, but when He came there was considerable perplexity regarding the time and manner of His Coming.¹ A major reason is that the intent of the Messianic prophecies was to nourish the Advent Hope rather than to satisfy curiosity as to the exact time and manner of Christ's Coming.

Daniel's Messianic Prophecy. It is remarkable that neither Jesus nor any New Testament writer appealed to Daniel's Messianic time

prophecy (Dan 9:24-27) to prove the Messianic claims of Christ. This is all the more surprising in view of the frequent appeals to Old Testament prophecies to prove Christ's Messiahship. If the time-element of Daniel's prophecy had been clearly understood, it would have been cited, especially by Matthew who quotes Old Testament prophecies extensively to prove the Messiahship of Jesus.

The lack of any reference to Daniel's prophecy can hardly be explained as unawareness of its existence, because we are told that many calculated on the basis of this prophecy the actual time of the Coming of the Messiah. To stop prevailing time-speculations rabbis placed a curse on anyone trying to calculate the time of the Coming of the Messiah out of Daniel's prophecy.²

Presumably the Gospel writers were aware of the various Messianic dates which had been derived from Daniel's prophecy, but they refrained from submitting an alternative date. A reason could be that they did not fully comprehend how Daniel's sixtyninth and seventieth weeks were actually fulfilled by Christ's life, death and resurrection. It is important to remember that generally prophecies are not fully understood before their actual fulfillment (Dan 9:1-21).

The failure of Christ's contemporaries to understand Old Testament prophecies regarding the time and nature of His First Advent cannot be explained merely as lack of faith on their part. Even a man of faith like John the Baptist was confused (Matt 11:3). Anthony A. Hoekema keenly observes that "if believers like John

the Baptist could have problems of this sort with predictions about Christ's first coming, what guarantee do we have that believers will not have similar difficulties with predictions about Christ's second coming?"³

Pointing to, not Pinpointing. This warning is obviously ignored by writers like Lindsey who claim to know exactly how and when all the Advent signs will be fulfilled. For them, the purpose of the signs is not just to point to the certainty of Christ's Return and the need for constant readiness, but rather to pinpoint God's specific timetable of events leading to and following the Second Advent.

This irresponsible use of Biblical prophecies has caused and is causing disillusionments and disappointments. To avoid future disappointments, it is important to recognize that the function of the Advent signs is to encourage, not sensational prognostications, but constant preparation and watchfulness. The purpose of the signs given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse is not to inform us about the exact time or manner of His Return, but to encourage us to be always ready for such event.

The keynote of the whole discourse is: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:42; cf. vv. 4, 3, 44; 25:13). Constant watchfulness and readiness have been encouraged by the generic nature of the signs of the times which, as noted earlier, have found a degree of fulfillment in every age.

Open to the Unexpected. To watch means to be open every day to witness and experience the unexpected. Genuine Christian living involves a constant response to the unexpected: "Watch therefore, for you do not know." Some Christians, like Lindsey, prefer to live in the false security of knowing the future. For them there is little to wait for because they have already preempted the future of any surprise with their agenda of expected End-time events.

Christians who rejoice in the divine favoritism which has granted them secret knowledge and special protection for the coming crisis wait impatiently for divine destruction to fall upon the competitors in the next church, city, or country. The signs which Christ gave to encourage constant watchfulness and readiness have become for them signs to foster a false sense of superiority and security.

IV. ADVENT SIGNS REVEAL THE ONGOING COSMIC CONTROVERSY

Signs of Divine Grace. A fourth vital function of the Advent signs is to bear witness to the ongoing cosmic struggle between the forces of Christ and the forces of Satan. Some signs, such as the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), reveal the outworking of the power of God and the growth of His Kingdom in this world.

Signs of Rebellion. Other signs, such as the proliferation of antichristian ideologies, military conflicts among nations, growth of

lawlessness, persecution of Christ's followers (Mark 13:6-9), indicate that the powers of evil are at work, attempting to lead the whole world into rebellion and destruction.

The believer who witnesses the signs of the ongoing conflict between divine and satanic forces is constantly challenged eagerly to wait for the day when the Lord will come to terminate this conflict and to establish a new order of justice and righteousness upon this earth (2 Pet 3:12).

Signs of Divine Judgment. Other signs, such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, famines, pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), reveal God's judgment upon human wickedness. They are harbingers of the final divine judgment to come. The Advent signs, then, tell us that there is a conflict going on in this world between divine and satanic forces, but the Lord will soon come as Savior and Judge to bring this conflict to an end.

For the believer, natural or man-made calamities are not a reason for despair, because he knows that nothing can defeat God's ultimate purpose. God is in control, working out His purpose. Unpleasant developments are to be expected and their intensification only serves to show that Christ will soon return to terminate this human drama.

A Call to Repentance. The Advent signs have a message also for unbelievers, summoning them to believe in Christ and be saved. Some incredulous and rebellious unbelievers will not

respond to any amount of signs. Christ rebuked such a people for failing to discern the signs of the times (Matt 16:30; Mark 8:11). To them the signs only served to increase their condemnation.

There are people, however, who do respond to the message conveyed by the Advent signs. When these persons hear and/or see disasters, lawlessness, military conflicts, lives changed by the power of the Gospel, they are led to search for meaning and hope in their lives.

Many Christians have been led to Christ through the experience of a calamity such as internment in a concentration camp, the loss of a loved one caused by war, a tornado, an earthquake or a criminal act. In such cases, the signs of divine judgment have led to reflection, to a change of behavior and to a commitment to the Lord. Thus they have fulfilled their prophetic function of calling sinners to repentance and salvation.

A vital function of the Advent signs is, then, to reveal the ongoing controversy between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil. This revelation challenges both believers and unbelievers to action. Believers are challenged eagerly to wait for the Lord to come to bring the conflict to an end. Unbelievers are challenged by the same signs to seek for those spiritual realities which cannot be destroyed by natural or man-made calamities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined four vital functions of the Advent signs.

First, we have seen that the Advent signs have served to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith of believers in every generation.

Second, we have found that the Advent signs point believers constantly forward to the consummation of redemption to be realized by the Coming of the Lord.

Third, we noted that the Advent signs are given in the Scripture to encourage, not calculation or prognostication, but constant preparation and watchfulness.

Lastly, we noted that the Advent signs reveal the ongoing controversy between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil. The revelation of such a conflict summons believers eagerly to wait for the Coming of the Lord who will bring the conflict to an end.

Many vital questions regarding the Second Advent have been left unanswered by this booklet. My intent here was merely to show, on the one hand, the fallacy of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle, and on the other hand, the true nature and function of End-time prophecies.

Those readers interested in deepening their understanding of many other vital aspects of the Second Advent, I would recommend my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness.**

Among all that is difficult to comprehend in Biblical prophecies, Christ's promise to come again stands out for its clarity, centrality and certainty. It is certainty rests not on a **fictitious** prophetic jigsaw puzzle like the one constructed by Lindsey, but on the **factual** redemptive accomplishments of Christ and on the experience of His power and grace in the life

of believers. While the sensational End-time scenario of authors like Lindsey is a fiction which can only lead to disappointments, the certainty of Christ's imminent Return is a fact which today can offer comfort and motivation to all believers called to live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present world.

Notes on Chapter VII

1. The Advent expectations in the Old and New Testaments are examined at length in the second and third chapters of my book **The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness**.

2. For a scholarly and comprehensive study on ancient Jewish attempt to determine the time of the Coming of the Messiah on the basis of Daniel 9:24-27, see Ben Zion Wacholder, "Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles," **Hebrew Union College Annual** 46 (1975):201ff.

3. Anthony A. Hoekema, **The Bible and the Future** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979), p. 133.



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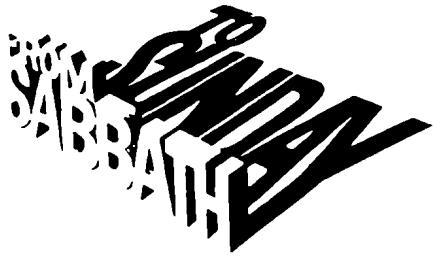
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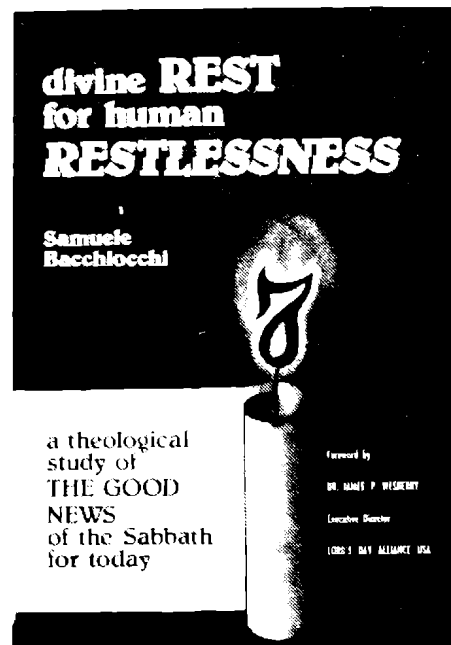
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Several Christian Churches in recent years have adopted as one of their fundamental beliefs, the view that Christ was entombed on a Wednesday afternoon and that He resurrected exactly seventy two hours later on a Saturday afternoon. Great importance is attached to a full three days and three nights entombment of Christ, because the latter is regarded as the sign par excellence given by Christ as a proof of His Messiahship.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

For many Christians today the Lord's Day has become a **holiday** rather than a **holy day**, a day to seek for personal pleasure and profit rather than for divine presence and peace. Yet today our restless and tension-filled society needs more than ever before the rest and renewal of the Lord's Day.

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